EIS001038

1 When I was first confronted with the idea of one permanent high-level nuclear waste repository, such as that being discussed for Yucca Mountain, I thought it made a lot of sense. Moving all the radioactive waste to one centralized location, I thought, would be better than relying on a large number of communities to build, guard, and monitor a large number of smaller facilities.

Then I realized that the proposed location is not central, but is almost at the opposite end of the country from most nuclear power plants. And I looked into the kinds and amount of transportation necessary to get the waste to southwest Nevada. I learned that shipping the waste is so fraught with potential for disaster that, on transportation grounds alone, I can no longer support such a facility at Yucca Mountain—even if all the geological and environmental questions about the site could be resolved.

It would take 30 years to move the 70,000 tons of high-level radioactive waste involved. The waste would be shipped through 43 of the 50 states, and threaten the safety of the more than 50 million people who live within a mile of shipping routes.

2 Saint Louis is on a major transportation corridor, and waste from 18 operating commercial plants east of the Mississippi, among the country's oldest and dirtiest, plus the Savannah River federal nuclear weapons plant, would be funneled through here. If there were 5949 shipments through St. Louis (a recent figure*, though they keep going up), that would be 199/year, or more than one shipment every other day for 30 years, moving through city and county on our highways and railways. It is projected that at least 40% of all truck shipments and 25% of rail shipments would pass through St Louis.

* Nevada Congressional Delegation 1-22-98

* Post-Dispatch 1-17-2000

The legislation under consideration allows for as many as 100,000* shipments. By contrast, moving the nuclear fuel from Three Mile Island in 1986 to 1990 involved only 22, and yet these few shipments involved two potentially serious incidents in the St. Louis area.

* Sen Richard Bryan 9-30-99

3 On March 23, 1987 there was a car-train collision at a crossing just east of Macklind and Manchester in South St. Louis. The train was carrying two casks of nuclear fuel. Think of the recent collision of a car and a MetroLink train: it seems that no amount of warning or planning or legislation can prevent people from driving where they shouldn't. As Congressman Gephardt said at the time of the 1987 accident, "It shows that in the shipment of hazardous and radioactive materials, it is not a question of whether problems will occur but when."*

4 If such a collision resulted in derailment, fire, or an explosion releasing radioactive gases in a populated area like South St. Louis, all an emergency crew could do would be to cordon off the area—do we have any procedures in place for speedy evacuation?

* P-D 3-25-87

5 The second Three Mile Island incident caused no damage but in its own way was even more alarming: in East St. Louis on Feb 9, 1988, a train carrying 3 casks of nuclear fuel was reconfigured and its original buffer car (between the locomotive and the first cask car) was replaced with an improperly placarded hopper car. This hopper car was erroneously labeled on all 4 sides FLAMMABLE SOLID, DANGEROUS WHEN WET,

and yet no one did anything to stop the train from leaving E. St. Louis at 7:51 AM and proceeding through St. Louis at rush hour—at "quite a high speed" according to George Jenkerson, Fire Marshall.

Some of the public officials inspecting the train had no experience with hazardous materials regulations; those who had experience did nothing to stop the train or notify federal officials. The hopper car should never have been placed next to the nuclear casks. If there had been an accident and fire, even though the hopper car contained no hazardous material, its warning placards would have prevented emergency crews from using water to fight the fire and cool the shipping casks. Between them, according to the Federal Railroad Administration's report on this incident, the shipper and the railroads violated 10 sections and 5 subsections of the Department of Transportation's Hazardous Materials Regulations.

6 Driving radioactive waste over the highways doesn't seem to be going any better than moving it by train. Describing the discovery, on Dec 15 and 16, 1997, of 4 leaking shipments of low-level radioactive waste traveling from Ohio to Nevada by truck, Senator Richard Bryan of Nevada said "If low-level waste cannot be shipped safely, are we really prepared to take the risk and challenge of high-level nuclear waste along the
7 major highways and railways of America?" He cited DOT statistics that "over a 10 year period there were more than 99,000 transport accidents releasing hazardous materials."*

* 9-30-99

8 Accidents happen. And where? So far, most of the country can only guess. "The most glaring omission of the DOE's entire analysis is the complete failure to identify national transportation routes between reactor sites and Yucca Mountain. For many years it has been obvious that the DOE's greatest fear is that they will by forced to identify specific routes through 43 states and hundreds of different communities."* Until they do, the whole issue can be regarded as Nevada's problem. If DOE can delay long enough it may be too late for communities that will be affected to do anything to block the shipments. "The suitability of the transportation routes is as important to the American public as the geology of Yucca Mountain." So far DOE has evaded its responsibility "to provide Americans with all of the facts so they can have a true debate on all of the risks associated with building a repository in Nevada."*

* Senator Bryan. 10-26-99

1 (cont'd.) Fortunately or unfortunately for us in St. Louis, we have a pretty good idea where and what our risks are. We have seen the Three Mile Island shipments come through, and the problems associated with 2 out of 22 of them. We know that if the Yucca Mountain repository is built we can look forward to at least 200 shipments per year of high-level radioactive waste moving through town on our already overcrowded highways, and having nuclear accidents there and on our rail lines for 30 years. Do we really need or want this troubled future? I think not.